

RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

— OF —

EAST KERRIER.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

1898.



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ANNUAL REPORT

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TO THE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EAST KERRIER.

GENTLEMEN,

During the past year of 1898, 200 births have been registered, 108 of which were males, and 92 females, giving an annual birth-rate of 23·5 per thousand inhabitants.

During the same period 179 deaths have been registered, 84 of which were males, and 95 females, giving an annual death-rate of 21·03 per thousand inhabitants.

As usual I again append a list of the birth-rates and death-rates for each year for the past ten years; and it must also again be kept in mind that the rates for the years 1889 to 1892, inclusive, are calculated on a population of 9,527 (before the amalgamation of Penwerris with Falmouth), whilst those for 1893 and the following years are calculated on a population of 8,510.

Birth-rates for past ten years.

1889—25·1

1890—27·5

1891—26·3

1892—24·6

1893—23·8

1894—24·3

1895—26·9

1896—25·7

1897—23·9

1898—23·5

Death-rates for past ten years.

1889—16·2

1890—20·7

1891—20·9

1892—14·1

1893—19·6

1894—20·6

1895—18·2

1896—14·3

1897—15·2

1898—21·03

The natural increase is twenty-one. The birth-rate is the lowest and the death-rate the highest for the past ten years, and therefore the natural increase is the least for the past ten years. Such an excessive number of deaths, and consequent high death-rate, as occurred in 1898, need some explanation. From the 179 deaths in the year eleven deaths must be deducted as "occurring within the district among persons not belonging thereto." Eight of these were of persons who were drowned in the wreck of the s.s. "Mohegan," and whose bodies were washed ashore at different points of the coast-line of our district; whilst three others were of lads, taken ill on board H.M.S. "Ganges," who were landed at the Hospital at Mylor Dockyard, and died there. The true number of deaths, therefore, which actually occurred in our district "among people belonging thereto" is 168, which gives a death-rate of 19·74. This is the true death-rate for 1898, and even this is very high. If we take the year 1897 as a good average year, the death-rate being 15·27, and compare it with 1898, the reason why the death-rate of the latter year was so much higher than that of 1897 will be easily seen and understood. In 1897 twenty died from Phthisis and other respiratory diseases, but in 1898 thirty-two died. From Heart Disease in 1897, seven died; in 1898, fourteen. From Influenza in 1897 there were no deaths; in 1898 seven died from this complaint. These few items, without continuing the comparison any further, are almost in themselves sufficient to account for the difference between the number of deaths in 1897 and 1898; and it was chiefly during the early months of 1898 that this difference was established, for it was during those months that Influenza raged fiercely, causing several deaths directly, whilst at the same time it doubtless hastened the deaths of many indirectly who, though weakly and perhaps already suffering from complaints, such as heart or chronic lung troubles, which sometime or other would end fatally, yet would have otherwise probably lived for years to come.

With this Report I enclose Forms A and B, duly filled in, according to the requirements of the Local Government Board. Table A gives the number of deaths in each parish during the year, and these are grouped according to age and according to cause of death. Table B shows the number of cases of Infectious Diseases which have arisen during the year. A study of both these Tables affords a fair idea of the sanitary history of the district during 1898.

On reference to Table A it will be seen that, from diseases which are compulsorily notifiable under the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act, four deaths were registered, and all from Typhoid Fever. But it must be clearly understood that only one of these deaths really belongs to the East Kerrier District, the remaining three deaths being of lads who were landed at Mylor Dockyard from H.M.S. "Ganges." These having, however, occurred within the Mylor Registration District, have to be registered as occurring within our District, and so consequently appear in our returns. From diseases which we have not made notifiable and which yet come under the heading of "Zymotics," there were eighteen deaths, six from Whooping Cough, five from Diarrhœa, and seven from Influenza. It will also be seen from the same Table that there were thirty-two deaths from diseases of the Respiratory System (fifteen from Phthisis, and seventeen from Bronchitis, Pneumonia, &c.): there were fourteen deaths from Heart Disease, whilst from Injuries sixteen died, the "Mohegan" deaths coming under this heading. Cancer claimed fourteen victims, which, however, is an improvement on 1897, when seventeen died from this disease.

Of the total number of deaths, there were thirty-two deaths of children under one year of age, nine of children between one and five years, whilst there were seventy-three deaths of people who had reached the age of sixty-five years and upwards, twenty-seven reaching eighty years and over, two or three of them being almost centenarians. It will thus be seen that nearly

one-half of the total number of deaths were of aged people, a large proportion of these dying in the early part of 1898, when Influenza was rife.

As I have above stated, there were thirty-two deaths of children under one year of age, and nine deaths between one and five years of age, that is, there were forty-one deaths of children under five years of age. The death-rate of infants under one year of age per thousand births was 160. I am sorry to say that this rate is higher than it has been for some years past, and I am more especially so because I had hoped that the effort which this Council made to diminish the Infantile Death-rate, by issuing cards of instruction on the Feeding and Rearing of Infants, would have had encouraging results. These cards were issued about the middle of 1897, and each Registrar of Births was requested to hand a card to the parent when registering the birth of a child. Because we do not see success at first from this effort we should not be discouraged, or cease to continue the effort. There are lots of other circumstances surrounding the life of an infant, besides its actual feeding, which make against its chance of life. The presence or absence during the year of epidemic diseases, such as Whooping Cough, Measles, Influenza, &c., to say nothing of good sanitary surroundings, cleanliness, care and attention, climatic conditions, &c., will have a strong determining influence one way or the other on the Infantile Death-rate. Some of these are more powerful for harm one year than another, and then less favourable results are obtained. Some are beyond our control, but some we can regulate and influence for the general good, whilst for others we are dependent upon those who have the care and bringing up of the infants. When, however, it is a known fact to us as a sanitary body, that each year a certain number of infants die as a result of ignorance in the matter of feeding, a fact which even the daily papers constantly bring before our notice, and which is borne out by the testimony of the whole medical profession, then I think it is a duty for us to adopt and,

when once adopted, to continue any measure calculated to remove such ignorance. I would therefore advise that these cards of instruction be still continued to be issued. I have the testimony of one medical man, who says he has noticed that some mothers, who used to rear their infants upon the old lines, are now attending to the instructions in the cards. It is difficult to get over old prejudices at once, but steady persistence may do a lot in time. Several things tended to increase the number of deaths among children in 1898: ten were prematurely born, and died in a few hours after birth, or were so weak at birth that they succumbed within a few days; six died from Whooping Cough, and the epidemic of Influenza, doubtless, had a deleterious influence upon the respiratory complaints which were so prevalent among both young and old in the early months of 1898. There is one thing which I have noticed and which, if permanent, will go to shew that some good is resulting from these cards, and that is that since their issue we have had less deaths from Convulsions and Rickets than in the years immediately preceding the date of their issue.

In Table B the total population, according to the census of 1891, is given, as well as that for each parish. In addition to this the same populations are given estimated to the middle of 1898. These estimations are required by the Local Government Board, and are made upon the manner of calculation adopted and approved of by the Registrar General. Until a new census is taken the population must show a yearly decrease when so estimated, there having been a decrease in population from 1881 to 1891.

During the year thirty-two cases of zymotic diseases were notified:—one case of Diphtheria, ten cases of Erysipelas, fourteen cases of Scarlet Fever, and seven cases of Typhoid Fever; whilst of Whooping Cough and Influenza there were a great many cases. Only three cases of Measles came to my knowledge.

The case of Diphtheria was at a farm house in Mylor, and I can give no definite cause for it. The ten cases of Erysipelas notified occurred in different parts of the District, and very nearly all were either in the first or the last quarter of the year, when easterly winds or wet and inclement weather prevailed. They were nearly all cases of facial erysipelas. All the fourteen cases of Scarlet Fever occurred in the last three or four months of the year; the majority were in Constantine, but two were in Mylor and two in St. Gluvias. It is very probable, in fact it is almost certain, that there were more cases, but often, unless the case is sufficiently bad to need the attendance of a medical man, one does not hear of these cases. It is therefore a matter of wonder, when such a contagious disease appears and when one sees how futile it is to attempt isolation in many of the houses, that the complaint does not always become generally epidemic.

Of Typhoid Fever there were seven cases notified, in addition to which there was a death from this disease in Flushing in January, but as the case commenced in 1897 it was included in the 1897 returns. Several cases of this disease were also present in the Hospital, Mylor Dockyard, during the latter months of 1898, but as they were not officially notified to me, I cannot say how many cases were landed there from the "Ganges." Three deaths occurred among these cases at the Dockyard; and though there is some doubt as to whether any diseases which come under the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act landed from the "Ganges" at the Dockyard, or even originating there, should be notified to this Council or not (sometimes in the past having been notified and sometimes not), yet when any deaths occur there these deaths are returned to me by the Registrar and have to be included in my returns, the Dockyard being within the Mylor Registration District. For myself I should say that all cases coming under the aforesaid Act landed or arising at the Dockyard should be notified to the Medical Officer of Health of the district within which the Dock-

yard is situated : for should small-pox, scarlet fever and such like highly contagious diseases be present there, it might be of the highest importance that their early presence should be known by the local Sanitary Authority. In saying this I wish it to be understood, from what I have seen in the past, that every precaution is taken by the naval authorities to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, whenever cases of such diseases have been landed at the Dockyard.

With regard to the seven cases which were notified as occurring in persons actually residing in our District, one case was at Burnt House, Mabe ; but this case was distinctly imported, the patient being sent home from service in Falmouth at the commencement of the fever. All the six remaining cases occurred in Flushing, and there was not a single case of the disease for the whole year in any other part of the District. The first case occurred in March in a boy whose mother had the fever only a few months before in the same house : at the back of the house is a small garden, and at the end of this garden there is a group of privies and cesspits of the usual type. The contents of these pits have to be carried through the houses to the street, when the pits are emptied. The second case was in April in one of the new houses on the Trefusis estate. There was nothing in or about the house which could have caused the disease, and as the fever occurred in one the greater part of whose daily life is spent in the heart of Flushing, I have no doubt that this case was attributable to the usual causes. The third case was in October and in Coventry Street. There was a pan-closet in the little yard at the back of the house and close to the back door ; but just behind, and only a few feet away, there is a collection of pits of the worst description. The people themselves said that the smell from these within their houses, upstairs as well as down, was sometimes unbearable. The fifth and sixth cases were children of case No. 3 ; whilst their father was ill, however, they were removed to a relative's house, where they sickened. At

this house I could see nothing calculated to cause the disease, but I found that they occasionally went to their home when their father was lying ill. The fourth case was at Trefusis Terrace. It was notified to me at the beginning of December. The premises were, as far as I could see, in a fairly good sanitary condition ; the pit in a yard, and some feet from the back of the house, was better than the average Flushing pit. But, in searching for a cause for the fever, I found that the woman, about a fortnight before she commenced to sicken, eat some oysters which were taken from an oyster-bed along the foreshore of Flushing. Upon this foreshore, and therefore upon these oyster-beds, the drains of Flushing discharge. Now just at the time this woman eat these oysters there was a case of Typhoid Fever in a house close to this foreshore (case No. 3) ; and owing to there being no garden behind the house the discharges from this case (No. 3) were thrown down the pan-closet and from thence found their way by the sewers to the foreshore. Considering that at the time these oysters were eaten typhoid excreta were being discharged upon the foreshore upon which the oyster-beds are, and considering that the time which elapsed between the eating of the oysters and the first onset of symptoms in the person who eat them corresponds with that of the Incubation or "hatching" stage of Typhoid Fever, it is only natural to conclude that here we have cause and effect as clear as possible. It has since been said that I am wrong in some of my data, that the time which elapsed between the eating of the oysters and the appearance of the fever was much longer than what I have given. I can only say that what I reported to this Council is merely what was told to me by the people in the house and by the patient herself, who was perfectly clear in her mind at the time ; and my enquiries were purposely very careful and guarded.

I have now given an account of all the cases of Typhoid Fever which have occurred in this District of 8,510 inhabitants during 1898, and it will be seen that practically all the cases

have been confined to one village of about 850 inhabitants at the most. For myself, I have never called the appearance of a few cases throughout the year and at scattered intervals an epidemic. I do not think there is any probability of such a thing occurring there, unless typhoid excreta get into the Water Supply, which seems scarcely possible, considering the situation of the source of that supply and the manner in which it is conveyed to and distributed through the village. But what I have said over and over again and say now is, that as long as Flushing remains as it is we shall ever be having one or more cases of Typhoid Fever every now and then, and for the size of the village and the number of its inhabitants quite out of all proportion in number when compared with the rest of the District. It was only in my last annual report, after giving credit to this Council for the genuine effort it had made to grapple with the objectionable system of excrement disposal existing in Flushing, that I said "but after all, though the possible effects and objectionable features of such a system have been guarded against, as far as possible, by the agreement entered into, yet there the thing is still, practically untouched; for the village is riddled with cess-pits, many of which are of the very worst description. Their contents pollute the air around, whilst, owing in many cases to their dilapidated state and their relation to the houses, the soil under and around many of the dwellings must be saturated with sewage. It is no wonder, therefore, that we get a case of Typhoid Fever now and then with such masses of offensive sewage lying and accumulating in the heart of this important village. Left alone they are a danger to health, and doubly so each time when they are disturbed for removal. These cess-pits are a constantly recurring grievance, and I think a time will soon come when the question of substituting some other system for the present one will have to be dealt with."

I think the time that I spoke of last year as coming has arrived, but what ought to be done is a question which will

require very deliberate consideration. I think that everyone who has the future welfare of Flushing at heart must see that something must be done to prevent these perennial appearances of Typhoid Fever, each one of which either claims a valuable life (for example, the case in January, when the man left a wife and large family behind him), or lays low for many weeks men and women who can ill be spared by their families. No one wishes to unnecessarily add to the rates, but apart from the question of the health of the regular inhabitants themselves, which, of course, is the first consideration, if Flushing wishes to attract visitors and new residents, in fact to go ahead as a health resort, for which it possesses in many respects unique qualifications, it must do what other places have done, and that is, put its house in order.

Of non-notifiable infectious diseases in 1898, we had Measles, Whooping Cough and Influenza. There were only three cases of Measles that I know of, two in St. Gluvias and one in Mylor. Whooping Cough continued from January to June. In the first two or three months it was very general, and then dragged on for another three months, rising and falling. Six deaths resulted from this complaint. The epidemic of Influenza continued from the commencement of the year to the end of March, and was very general. Many of the cases were most severe, owing to the serious pulmonary complications which accompanied the attack, and seven deaths were registered as being directly due to this disease; but many whose deaths were registered as being due to some other cause were no doubt Influenza-tainted.

Throughout the year Mr. Chubb and I have visited the several parishes of the district, and a good deal of quiet, but very necessary, sanitary work has been done. Many things we see are corrected without bringing them before the notice of this Council. The houses of the working classes generally throughout the district are fairly satisfactory; here and there we meet with cases needing better and more accommodation,

but it is either not obtainable, or the case is not sufficiently bad to compulsorily shut up the house. The only bad case was that at Coldwind, Perran, upon which I fully reported at the time; it was speedily remedied, and at subsequent visits we have found the improved condition of things to be maintained.

Mr. Chubb has paid great attention throughout the year to the Dairies and Cow-sheds; all these are, I believe, in a satisfactory condition. They have been regularly inspected every quarter. The Slaughter Houses, too, throughout the district have received similar attention, and great improvements have been carried out in them generally. During the year complaints were made, more especially about one or two of the Slaughter Houses, of the abominable nuisance caused by the blood pits, and chiefly when they were emptied and carried out as dressing over the fields. In consequence of these complaints, this Council served notices on the several owners of the Slaughter Houses to abate the nuisances, and Mr. Chubb tells me that these pits are much better looked after now and are not likely to cause any more annoyance.

DRAINAGE. No special or important drainage work has been done during the year. The question of improved drainage in Flushing has been before the Council and the Council decided to call in Mr. Henderson, of Truro, to advise them on the matter; but I believe his report has not yet been received. The main drain at Mylor Bridge has received attention and been extended; and improvement has been made in the main sewer at Budock and connections made thereto. During the year the bed of the river in Budock has been cleaned up; the main in the bed of this river works well, and altogether the appearance and condition of this river is quite another thing from what it used to be. All that it requires now is occasional scavenging work, and this is necessitated by people throwing things into the river when there is not much water running, instead of having them removed by the scavenging cart.

WATER SUPPLY. Improvements have been made to the supply at Mawnan Smith by adding a syphon, &c., to the well, and by replacing old pipes with new ones. But complaints have been made to me by many in Mawnan Smith of the distance they have to go to fetch water. The solitary tap is practically outside the village and at a very inconvenient distance for many at that end of the village away from the tap, and more especially for several houses situated in the road leading from Mawnan Smith to Carlidnick. I would recommend that the supply be piped on to the corner of this road, where it joins Mawnan Smith, and that a tap be placed there. There is no doubt that this would be a great convenience to a good many houses, and it could be done at no great expense. It would add but little to the expense if, whilst this work was being done, another tap was placed near the Wesleyan Chapel. Improvements have been carried out in the water supply of Ponsanooth. Ball taps have been placed to the upper tank and new pipes have been laid from the main to supply the upper part of Ponsanooth. A branch-pipe has also been laid from the source in the croft to the south-east part of the village for the better supply of that part. Every open well throughout the District has been inspected and cleaned when required.

It will be remembered that last year the two wells at Tregew were closed, as being unfit for drinking purposes, and since then there has been no public supply, although some of the houses have private wells; these, however, run dry for several months almost every year. Mr. Cloak, Mr. Chubb and I met on the spot, and our observations were embodied in a report to this Council. I believe it has been practically decided to provide a new supply, which will be above suspicion. When this is done a distinct want will have been met.

During last year, and for a long time previously, grave complaints were made in those parts of the district supplied by the Falmouth Waterworks Company of the quality of the water, and it was considered that the chief reason for all this

was that the Company had not proper provision at the reservoirs for filtering the water. As a result of the agitation, I believe that the Company has since gone to considerable expense in making filter beds, and it is to be hoped that all causes for complaint will now be removed.

EXCREMENT DISPOSAL. In former reports I have referred to matters coming under this heading, and I do not know that I can add anything fresh. The system generally in vogue is well known; it has its disadvantages, which are more pronounced in some parts of the District than in others. I think it would be a good plan if the Council adopted an uniform pattern of closet for the District, so that when old ones are demolished and new ones built, or when new houses are being erected with closets attached, those who are erecting them may have something to go by, and which, when built, will be satisfactory to this Council. One sees such a variety about, some well built and others built of such flimsy materials that they become dilapidated in a very short time.

The school closets in the various parishes have received a good deal of attention, and are now in a very satisfactory condition. Those at Mawnan Smith School have been entirely rebuilt and now leave nothing to be desired.

SCAVENGING. This is done regularly in Budock and Flushing, but in no other place in the district.

At one of the meetings of the Council the subject of tuberculosis among cows, and the possible effect that milk from cows suffering from tuberculosis might have upon those consuming such milk was discussed. I am glad to say that the Council unanimously adopted a resolution, calling the attention of the County Council to this important matter. Any measure that is calculated to contribute, even in a small way, towards lessening the excessive number of deaths from phthisis and tubercular affections of other

organs, will be a blessing. I should think there were quite thirty deaths last year from tuberculosis of one kind or another.

There are other matters to which I could refer, such as the question of an Isolation Hospital, &c., but I have so often referred to them in previous Reports that I do not think it necessary to say more, than that my opinion and advice on these questions are the same now as in the past.

I have the honour, gentlemen, to remain,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES BLAMEY,

Medical Officer of Health.

January 30th, 1899.